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ABSTRACT

In the late 1970's androgyny as a concept gained respectability, accompanied, however, by a backlash. Debate centered primarily on scientific grounds and both sides failed to define the concepts of masculinity, femininity and androgyny, including possible cultural relativity. Most empirical research on androgyny uses either the BSRI or the PAQ tests which contain separate masculinity and femininity scales with low degrees of correlation, thereby supporting dualistic conceptions: both tests measure abstract personality traits; and neither has a high correlation to sex role attitudes, behaviors, or preferences. In designing and interpreting studies involving psychometric measures, scale content must be considered. Validity of the dualistic approach is currently questionable. Similarly, the "superiority" of being androgynous is questionable and needs further definition. Instrumentality, expressiveness, and interactions between the sexes currently have profound and complex implications needing clarification. (Author/LS)

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Androgyny as Trait and as Role: Unresolved Issues

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Spurred by the women's movement, the concept of androgyny has leapt into prominence in the past five years. In contrast to an earlier view that like biological sex, masculinity and femininity in their psychological sense are essentially dimorphic and hence incompatible, what has come to be known as androgyny theory proclaims that masculinity and femininity are independent dimensions so that people not only can be but often are both. Contrary to the traditional belief that to be psychologically healthy, adjusted, and socially effective, males must be masculine and females must be feminine, this new theory states that psychological health belongs not to the sex-typed but to the Androgyne.

This theoretical view of androgyny has roots in both the present and the imagined future, and in both ideology and objective, behavioral data. According to one version of radical feminism, a society in which sex-role distinctions were abolished and the salience of gender minimized to the extent made possible by anatomy would be more just, more efficient and healthier for its members than our current sexist society. In such a society, it is said, men and women would be "androgynous," although in what sense is unclear. In the here and now, it is claimed that the objective evidence supports both the dualistic conception of masculinity and

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femininity-- that they are separate dimensions-- and the hypothesis that both sets of characteristics contribute positively to effective functioning, i.e., to the superiority of androgyny. This proposition-- that by all objective standards "Androgyny" is a desirable state that all should strive to achieve-- permeate current text books on sex-roles and the psychology of men and women, supposedly with the weight of behavioral science evidence behind it.

As the popularity of the Androgynous world view grows, a backlash is beginning to form. Set against the enthusiastics, a group of critics is emerging who are attacking the validity of the concept itself and the claims that have been made for the virtues of the Androgynous condition. At least to date, the objections seem based more on scientific than political grounds, and are not mere defenses of the status quo. Scientific controversy can, of course, be enlightening, forcing both sides to sharpen their concepts and refine their theories, and stimulating research to resolve issues under debate. Controversy, however, can also take the form of fruitless bickering that draws attention away from the real issues and delays clarification.

The critical issue that both sides have yet to face squarely is specification and analysis of just what "masculinity" and "femininity" are, and hence, just what Androgyny is. There has been great reluctance to undertake this kind of analysis. Among proponents and critics of "Androgyny" alike, the common attitude seems to be that everyone knows what "masculinity" and "femininity" are and that the person who asks for a definition is being obtuse, perverse, or persnickety. The only problem is that answering the question, "What do you mean" by "But you <u>know</u> what I mean" is no answer at

all. "Masculinity" and "femininity" remain vague, global notions. This global approach leads to further consequences. Masculinity and femininity are lumped together under some umbrella heading such as "sex roles" or "sex role identification," with no attempt to relate them to accepted behavioral science usages of the term "role." We are also relatively indifferent in our research to our measures of "masculinity," "femininity," and androgyny and what they measure. As long as they differentiate the sexes in the predicted direction, measures tend to be treated as interchangeable. And finally, we have easily adopted, without question, a hypothesis that suggests that individuals classified as sex-typed or Androgynous on a measure of narrow content, such as the Bem Sex Role Inventory or other similar measure are "rigid" or "flexible" in the full range of behaviors that encompass masculinity and femininity.

We approach the topic of gender differentiation with a seeming casualness and lack of conceptual precision that we would not allow in ourselves or in others in any other substantive area. This is curious and it is important to ask: why? I suggest that we have only partially freed ourselves from traditional world views about men and women that have led to inappropriate a priori assumptions that we have allowed to guide and shape our research. We still retain as a legacy from the past the presupposition that "masculinity" and "femininity" are each unidimensional phenomena.... highly correlated clusters of attributes and behaviors that permit us to postulate single global concepts. We have changed to the extent of postulating that masculinity and femininity are independent of each other, rather than forming a single bipolar dimension, but, we still treat as axiomatic-- a first principle simply to be accepted-- the assumption that each is unifactorial.

However, this supposition may not be correct. Masculine and feminine attributes are empirically diverse in nature and within each category, it is possible that the several components are only loosely connected and often only minimally correlated. If an individual is "masculine" or "feminine" in one set of characteristics, this may tell almost nothing about the individual's masculinity or femininity in other types of characteristics. In fact, a review of the evidence (e.g., Spence & Helmreich, submitted for publication) strongly suggests that masculinity and femininity are both multidimensional phenomena. This hypothesis suggests that use of unqualified global concepts is both misleading and of little predictive validity. If this is so, we now have to ask, who quite specifically is this androgynous person who figures so prominently in our research and whom we discuss so glibly in our theories? More concretely, what specifically do our measures of Androgyny tap and what are the implication for behavior of one kind of Androgyny vs another?

Before attempting partial answers to these questions, I should call your attention first to the one accepted definition of "masculinity" and "femininity." These are collective terms referring to those characteristics and behaviors that distinguish, in a statistical sense between males and females in a given society, but implying nothing about the co-occurrence of these characteristics in a particular individual. In most societies, there is an incredibly diverse array of sex differences, many of them differing from one society to the next. "Masculinity" and "femininity" phenomena, then, vary from the universal and timeless to the particular and time-bound. On the surface level, "Androgyny," the possession of both masculine and feminine characteristics, is therefore as culturally relative as a total concept

as is "masculinity" and "femininity."

The empirical phenomena differentiated the sexes in our society and thus defining "masculinity" and "femininity" can be classified in various ways. One type of abstract categorization distinguishes between traits and roles. Traits are relatively stable, generalized dispositional tendencies-- they are internally located properties of the organism that are one of the determinants of behavior but not isomorphic with behavior. Traits that men as a group possess to a greater degree than women as a group or that women possess more than men form one subclass of "masculine" and "feminine" characteristics.

The term "roles" has a number of meanings as used by anthropologists and sociologists; position in a social structure and its associated status, the division of labor in a society according to the individual's position, and rules for behaviors..., i.e., shared expectations as to how role incumbents will behave in a given situation, and the rewards and negative sanctions for role conformity or violation. When status, responsibilities, or rules for behavioral interactions are linked to gender, one refers to sex-role distinctions.

Conceptually, traits are not roles, nor role attitudes nor role preferences. Traits may conflict or be congruent with externally imposed role demands or with the person's role values. Traits, along with role attitudes and situations demands, jointly determine what the person actually does.

As an example consider personality traits such as dominance or assertiveness. Whether one is talking about men or women, members of each sex find themselves in role situations demanding varying degrees of dominance

or assertiveness or their opposites. When interacting with persons of higher status or power (e.g., graduate student interacting with his or her dissertation supervisor), it behooves us to behave somewhat submissively and nonassertively. Conversely, when we occupy the superior role, we are expected to take the lead. In some situations, relative status may be associated with the role incumbents' sex. Those possessing the personal traits of dominance and asertiveness may respond more easily and fully to situational demands for their overt display. When role demands contradict their expression, individuals' role attitudes and values largely determine the degree to which they suppress them. One of the variables determine how dominant or assertive one behaves is a stable dispositional trait, but there are other determining variables, such as role demands and attitudes.

Consider another, less complicated, example. Traits such as assertiveness are purportedly "masculine" and traits such as "kind" are feminine. Interest in fishing and automechanism is masculine and interest in sewing and cooking is feminine. These masculine and feminine traits variables are different in kind from interests and even less likely to be correlated with them. One can be Androgynous in interests as well as traits but the person who is Androgynous in one respect is not necessarily androgynous in any other. If this is true, we must now ask: What kind of androgyny have we been concerned about in our research?

Much of the empirical research on "androgyny" has employed one of two measures: Bem's Sex Role Inventory or BSRI and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire or PAQ devised by my colleagues and myself. Both contain separate Masculinity and Femininity scales that have a low degree of

correlation and hence support a dualistic conception of Masculinity and Femininity.

In terms of content, what do these measures tap? In its current, shortened version (Spence & Helmreich, 1978; Helmreich, Spence & Wilhelm, in press), the PAQ is relatively simple to describe:

1) It is a conventional personality test, containing abstract trait descriptions that make no reference to behavior or to the specific situations eliciting these dispositions. In no legitimate sense of the word is it a measure of sex role preferences or behaviors.

2) The Masculinity or M scale consists of self-oriented, instrumental or agentic traits, e.g., independent, active, competitive, etc. The Femininity or F scale consists of interpersonally oriented expressive traits (e.g., kind, tactful, aware of others feelings). Within each scale, then, the content is conceptually similar, but the two scales fall into distinct conceptual categories. The labels-- Masculinity and Femininity-- for these instrumental and expressive clusters are justified because the sexes differ both stereotypically and in self-report on the two scales; this is all these labels are intended to imply.

3) All the traits are socially desirable-- i.e., in judgments of the ideal man and woman, it was found that some degree of instrumentality and some degree of expressiveness with respect to these particular examplars are desirable in both men and women. The prosocial natures of the items is a critical feature of the scales. This is shown in recent research (Spence, Helmreich, & Holahan, in press) in which we have extended the PAQ to include scales tapping socially undesirable instrumental and expressive traits. The correlation between cross-sex scales is not the same for positive and negative traits. Further, parallel scales-- (e.g.,

desirable and undesirable masculine scales) are not strongly related. And finally, the correlation between the scales and criterion variables are not the same for socially desirable and undesirable "masculine" and "feminine" traits.

4) Factor analyses reconstruct the socially desirable M and F scales, i.e., the instrumental and expressive clusters are each unifactorial.

Despite its name, the Bem Sex Role Inventory is also predominantly a measure of abstract personality traits. Most, but not all, of its items are also socially desirable and most refer to instrumental and expressive characteristics. Factor analyses (e.g., Pedhazur & Tetenbaum, in press) suggest in both sexes the presence of more than two factors, suggesting the effects of items that do not represent socially desirable instrumental and expressive traits.

Both the BSRI and PAQ have construct validity as measures of socially desirable components of instrumentality and expressiveness. No direct comparison has been made of the validities of the two scales but one almost has to believe it would be higher for the PAQ because of its cleaner content. A survey of the evidence (e.g., Spence & Helmreich, submitted .) suggests that neither instrument is highly related to sex role attitudes, or to sex-roles behaviors or preferences as a general class. The general hypothesis that Androgynous individuals as defined by the PAQ or BSRI have greater role flexibility than others has little validity, the purported "flexibility" holding primarily for behaviors involving instrumentality and expressiveness. This finding indicates that one subclass of masculinity and femininity-- the characteristics measured by the PAQ and BSRI-- is not necessarily related to other classes. The data suggest that we must also be cautious about

treating seemingly similar measures as the same. A recent study by Kelley, Furman and Young (1978) correlating four "Andro" scales is illustrative. With only one exception, very modest correlations occurred between parallel scales. The highest correlation by far-- .85-- was between the PAQ and BSRI M scales, the pair of scales having the greatest overlap in content. These data suggest in still another way that "masculinity" and "femininity" are not unidimensional and that in designing and interpreting studies involving psychometric measures, we must take scale content into account.

The multidimensionality of sex-differentiating behaviors and attributes poses the challenge of developing a more complex scheme for describing and measuring gender-related phenomena. Until we have identified and measured the components of these broad classes of phenomena, the validity of a dualistic approach as a general model will remain in question. In the case of certain personality characteristics, masculine and feminine attributes have been shown to form orthogonal dimensions and hence it becomes conceptually meaningful and empirically useful to talk about "androgyny." Many other sex-related attributes, such as interest patterns, may also be dualistic in nature but other phenomena, including some sex-role behaviors, may have bipolar qualities and make the androgyny concept meaningless.

Similarly, we cannot yet conclude that "Androgyny" is a superior state. The claims for its virtues, as I mentioned earlier, are of two kinds: (a) an ideological commitment to an essentially asexual society, free of social distinctions based on gender. However, many different social designs could be devised or could evolve that would be relatively gender-free, each of which has different consequences and implications. To label a "desexed" society as "Androgynous" seems to involve a peculiar usage of the form.

If it refers to nothing more than "free of gender distinction," then at best it is superfluous and at worst, full of misleading surplus meaning. (b) The second claim asserts that "Androgynous" individuals are psychologically healthier and socially more effective than others. If we mean by Androgynous possession of both masculine and feminine attributes (by current standards), the generality of this claim, like the dualistic notion that underlies it, has yet to be demonstrated.

The one common and concrete element that appears in theorizing and in speculations about "Androgyny" is instrumentality and expressiveness as personality characteristics (though often mislabeled as "roles"). The "Androgyny" that is urged upon us clearly includes these personal trait dimensions. The most reasonable empirical question to ask concerns not Androgyny as a global construct, but these particular components of masculinity and femininity: Is this type of Androgyny associated with superior psychological functioning? The answer is somewhat clouded by the use of nonparallel instruments to measure masculine instrumentality and feminine expressiveness and of different scoring methods to combine masculine and feminine scores. (See Spence & Helmreich, in press, for a discussion of scoring issues.) The evidence to date suggests that measures of self-esteem, lack of emotional disturbance, and other indices of effective functioning tend to be positively associated with instrumentality in both sexes, often quite strongly. Relationships with feminine expressiveness are both weaker and more variable-- correlations being relatively low and sometimes negative. This implies that in a rank order sense, Androgynous individuals are sometimes highest, with Masculine individuals second, and sometimes the reverse. Whether this indicates that "Masculinity" is sometimes better than Androgyny

is a matter of value judgment. In our work on achievement motivation (Helmreich & Spence, Discovery, 1978), we have found that feminine expressiveness has a slight negative correlation with Competitiveness, so that Masculine individuals are somewhat more competitive than Androgynous individuals. Whether Androgyny is more or less "desirable" than Masculinity depends on how one values competitiveness.

The implications of instrumentality and expressiveness for men and for women and for the interactions between the sexes are quite profound but also quite complex. When we learn to disentangle instrumentality and expressiveness from other gender-related phenomena (most particularly, from sex-roles, itself a complex topic), we will begin to formulate appropriate questions-- the first, major, step towards answering them.

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